

## Corner: UNEP/SETAC Life Cycle Initiative

### Looking ahead to 2003

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#### The Initiative's Objectives

The Life Cycle Initiative builds on the ISO 14040 standards and intends to establish approaches with best practice for a Life Cycle Economy. In May 2000, UNEP and SETAC signed a Letter of Intent and established the Life Cycle Initiative for which the overall objective is to develop and disseminate practical tools for evaluating the opportunities, risks, and trade-offs associated with products over their entire life cycle to achieve sustainable development. This includes the propagation of the knowledge of existing bodies on life cycle approaches and the stimulation of multidisciplinary scientific work. The general aim is the enhancement of LCA applications and LC Thinking in management practice. Specific aims are:

- Exchange of information on the conditions for successful application of LCA and LC Thinking;
- Exchange of information about the interface between LCA and other tools;
- Implementation of educational activities related to the application of LCA and LC Thinking;
- Enhancement of the availability of sound LCA data and methods;
- Provision of guidance on the use of LCA data and methods.

The first two aims refer to what has been defined as Life Cycle Management (LCM), while the last two aims are related to the fact that the availability of peer reviewed, international-level Life Cycle Inventory (LCI) databases and widely accepted Life Cycle Impact Assessment (LCIA) methods are vital for the reliable and easy use of LCA. The third aim is to foster the use of both LCA and LCM. The initiative was launched by UNEP's Executive Director Klaus Toepfer at UNEP's 7th High Level Seminar on Cleaner Production in April 2002. Further information can be found in Int J LCA 7 (4) 191–202 (2002).

#### 1 LC.net

We would like to inform you that a regular quarterly newsletter – called LC.net – is in preparation by way of which we shall report about the activities of the Life Cycle Initiative and other interesting news related to life cycle thinking.

#### 2 Results of the workshop 'Definition Studies' (Barcelona)

The major event for the LC Initiative in the last three months was the workshop 'Definition Studies' in Barcelona on 1 December 2002. The objective of the workshop was to discuss the initiative's work program for the next years. The results are relevant for the next meeting of the International Life Cycle Panel (ILCP) on 24 January 2003 in Paris, where decisions will be made for the work program in 2003. The main outcomes were:

1. The experts supported UNEP's proposal to open regional programs of the LC Initiative which are to focus on *capacity building*.
2. The definition study on **Life Cycle Inventory** was well received; apart from capacity building, a possible focus for 2003 could be *data quality criteria for peer review* to support database evaluation.
3. The definition study on **Life Cycle Impact Assessment** is in good progress. A point of attention is that the relevance for *application of the results* should be made clearer.
4. The definition study on **Life Cycle Management** has started. While more effort is needed to focus it, because of the broad topic, efforts are underway to develop a draft along with the other two studies. A point of attention is to ensure that the results are developed in closer interaction with all stakeholders involved.
5. The **user-needs survey** should go ahead. This survey is considered as an important part of the initiative. In general, the initiative was seen to be in the right position to carry out such surveys.

##### 2.1 User-Needs Survey

Due to the conclusion to promote the user-needs survey, I would like to ask you again for your contribution to this survey. Two questionnaires, one for Life Cycle Assessment and another for Life Cycle Management, can be downloaded at <http://www.unep.org/pc/sustain/lca/lcini.htm> and/or at <http://www.scientificjournals.com/> (here go to Gate to EHS and click on UNEP/SETAC LC Initiative). Please send it back to us and/or distribute it in your network.

Until now we have received around 100 questionnaires, mainly on LCA and with a clear lack of responses from Asia/Pacific. Therefore, I would especially like to invite those of you from that region to reply.

(1) **User-needs survey for LCA:** The aim of this survey is to support the work of the two LCA groups (LCI and LCIA). It consists of four sections, general information, specifics relating to LCI, specifics relating to LCIA, and a space for inclusion of general comments.

(2) **User-needs survey for LCM:** The aim of this survey is to gain insights and feedback from individuals with a variety of backgrounds (government, industry, academia and NGOs) on expectations and key developments to promote life cycle thinking and the related supporting methodological approaches.

Results from this questionnaire will be utilised to inform a core team of authors of a definition study, to develop an oversight over user needs and a resulting work program proposal how to meet the expressed interest best.

Opposite to LCA, the LCM concept is still at an early stage of development. No agreed-upon definition exists. As this is a clear weakness, it also offers a great opportunity: The LC Initiative can develop an attractive Life Cycle Management concept that ideally meets user needs.

LCM has been introduced as an integrated concept for managing the total life cycle of goods and services towards more sustainable production and consumption. For this purpose, LCM builds on the existing procedural and analytical environmental assessment tools and integrates economic, social and environmental aspects. LCM should be applicable for both industrial and governmental organisations as a preventive and sustainability driven approach towards sustainable production and consumption.

The program intends to educate all relevant stakeholders about the importance of a systems and life-cycle perspective to inform decisions and decision making processes, e.g. in policy making, corporate strategy and product design, buying and consumption. This includes organisations of all size and across all regions.

#### 3 UNEP/SETAC Partners

UNEP/SETAC partners in the LC Initiative are AIST (National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology), Japan, Alliance for Beverage Cartons and the Environment (ACE), International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), Government of the Netherlands, Government of Switzerland and the CIRAG/ Government of Quebec. For further information about the initiative visit our website <http://www.unep.org/pc/sustain/lca/lcini.htm>.